



PLANNING COMMISSION SYNOPSIS

Thursday, March 12, 2015

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Nordstrom called the Planning Commission study meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the McLeod Conference Room in the Bloomington Civic Plaza.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Nordstrom, Willette, Spiess, Fischer, Batterson, Goodrum

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Bennett

STAFF PRESENT: Markegard, Schmidt, Hiller

Chairperson Nordstrom called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m..

ITEM 1 6:02 p.m.

CASE:	10000A-15
APPLICANT:	City of Bloomington
LOCATION:	Citywide
REQUEST:	Study discussion of Miscellaneous Issues Ordinance

SPEAKING FOR THE APPLICANT:

Jason Schmidt, Planner

Glen Markegard, Planning Manager

PUBLIC HEARING DISCUSSION:

Schmidt explained this study item would provide an opportunity to discuss policy issues related to the annual miscellaneous issues update of Bloomington's City Code. After Commission discussion and input, the draft will be finalized and brought forward for a final recommendation at a Planning Commission public hearing scheduled for April 23, 2015. Items included in the Miscellaneous Issues Ordinance may not on their own merit the overhead of drafting, reviewing, publishing, and hearing an ordinance. The proposed amendments are primarily intended to clarify the existing provisions in more detail, to assist in public understanding and aid in enforcement.

Schmidt stated staff seeks, in addition to general input on the draft included in the packet, specific input from the Planning Commission on the following items: beekeeping, landscaping standards, and permanent sign regulations. He explained beekeeping is currently allowed in residential areas subject to standards and the proposed changes would add beekeeping as a permitted accessory use in non-residential zoning districts, remove beekeeping from the limited agriculture and farm animal definitions, create a bee and beekeeping definition, and create beekeeping standards. Schmidt noted two Bloomington businesses have expressed interest in beekeeping on their properties.

After discussion, the Planning Commission expressed general support for allowing beekeeping in non-residential zoning districts. Spiess, Willette and Nordstrom stated they support the

proposed ordinance and possibly with less restrictive standards while Batterson expressed caution and concerns regarding setbacks. Fischer stated raising bees is more complex and expressed concern for public safety and training. Goodrum expressed general support, raised the issue of screening rooftop beehives and asked for clarification on the terms used in the proposed ordinance (accessory use, mixed use districts). Markegard explained the term accessory means the beekeeping use would need to be incidental to the primary use on the site. Schmidt added that any property with three or more dwelling units would not be able to have bees. Schmidt stated staff will research additional cities outside of Minnesota to determine what other communities have for setback requirements.

Schmidt stated the second topic of discussion is a proposed change to allow perennial plants to count toward a percentage of the requirement for shrubs. He explained based on the price and size difference between perennial plants and shrubs, staff is proposing four perennial plants to count as being equal to one shrub in the existing ordinance and be allowed to substitute for up to 50 percent of the shrub requirement. Schmidt explained with the popularity of perennial grasses, applicants have increasingly been requesting to use perennials in place of shrubs. In a few recent cases, the City Council and Planning Commission supported flexibility to substitute perennial plants for shrubs to meet landscape and screening requirements. Schmidt noted the proposed change is to codify flexibility that recently has been granted through the Planned Development process. He asked for comments and input from the Commission.

After discussion, the Planning Commission expressed general support for allowing perennials to replace shrub standards at the proposed 4:1 ratio. Goodrum expressed support but questioned whether enforcement will be more difficult when it comes to compliance. Batterson expressed concern that perennials (ornamental grasses) can look a little messy and the purpose of landscaping is for aesthetics. He stated he believes perennials can look good in certain types of environments, but not in all. He suggested lowering the percentage from 50 percent to perhaps 25 percent. Nordstrom added that maintenance and design are what make a successful landscaping plan. Willette stated he believes perennials require more watering and can vary significantly in height (screening concern). Fischer agreed that allowing perennials could be more difficult when it comes to enforcement. Spiess stated she supports the use of perennials as drafted and believes it makes sense to allow perennials, as they require less maintenance than shrubs. Willette commented that the City would be safer sticking with shrubs rather than allowing perennials in the long run and their life spans are different. Willette added perennials take more care than shrubs. Spiess noted that in her experience here in Minnesota, perennials have been easier to care for and have been more successful than shrubs.

Schmidt stated the next topic for discussion is an amendment to allow signage on multiple tenant buildings in the Class IV and V Sign Districts on a third or fourth elevation as long as there is a separate tenant ground level exterior public entrance on the elevation. He stated the issue is the Code currently only allows signage on two elevations within the Class IV and V Sign Districts. He stated last year, commissioners voiced concern regarding the limitation of tenant signage to only two elevations during review of a variance application for signage on a third elevation. He explained during this application review, there was Commission consensus that identification signs serve the way finding needs of citizens and should therefore be allowed on more than two elevations. He asked for comments and input from the Commission.

After some discussion, Batterson stated he is in favor of allowing single or multi-tenant

building owners the flexibility to erect signage on more than two facades even if there are no public entrances on those facades. Nordstrom noted that in multi-tenant buildings often the larger anchors take up the bulk of the sign allocations and the smaller tenants' signage gets lost and lose its purpose. Nordstrom added wayfinding is very important for the public so they know where to park their vehicles and to identify the entrance to the smaller tenants. Fischer stated having a sign located over a public door/entrance is reasonable and should be allowed. Batterson stated he supports greater flexibility for signs to be on three sides of a building. Spiess added she believes additional signage should be allowed, but be restricted to over a public entrance for public safety reasons.

Commissioner Batterson asked staff to comment on the issue of channel letter vs. cabinet style construction. Schmidt stated the current Code requires a property owner to choose between channel letter or cabinet style type construction on a multi-tenant building. In recent years, logos have often been defined as cabinet style construction by our current Code. The proposed amendment included in the 2015 Miscellaneous Issues amendments will change the definition of channel letter construction to include symbols and shapes as long as they meet channel letter construction standards and will no longer require the 25 percent maximum size of the total square foot sign requirements.

Schmidt asked if there were any comments on the other sections of the draft ordinance submitted. There were no additional comments.